



Clean Catch Cornwall Local Focus Group – 27 March 2025

Meeting date and Time: Thursday 27th March 2025 11.30am – 16:00pm.

Location: Alverton Hotel, Truro

Groups represented: Fishermen, Clean Catch consortium members (Cefas chair), Bycatch Monitoring Programme, Fishtek Marine, Chelonia Ltd

Apologies: Cornwall Wildlife Trust



Meeting aims

Introductions, confirmation of LFG function and member roles, briefing on Clean Catch (CC) programme expansion, update on local activities.

Meeting objectives for LFG members

- Understand remit of the Cornwall LFG and its role
- Understand this phase of the CC programme
- Share knowledge and local expertise on on-going activities

Key topics covered at the meeting

- Summary of CC activities and the purpose of the Cornwall LFG
- CC expansion and governance updates
- Engagement and feedback mechanisms
- CC App and PODs
- Pinger trial update
- Passive Acoustic Reflector update
- Chelonia guest speaker

Overview and Governance

Clean Catch Expansion Phase

The CC programme expanded in 2024, being led by a consortium of partners; MMOC, Arribada Initiative, Mindfully Wired, Zoological Society of London (ZSL) and Cefas) with a project timeline spanning from 2024 to 2026.

The objectives of this phase are to enhance inclusion of key groups, overcome barriers to engagement with fishermen, review bycatch risk hotspots, continue the testing of pingers for reducing cetacean bycatch, expand CC to new areas (geographies) and taxa, develop approaches to social science within the CC context, and facilitate national and international knowledge exchange with others researching monitoring and mitigation of sensitive species bycatch.

Clean Catch Governance Overview

Milly explained the new approach to governance and knowledge exchange for the CC expansion phase, including the establishment of the Programme Governance Board, National Advisory Board, Local Focus Groups and Expert Working Groups.

Further information can be found in the report: [Our new approach to Governance and Knowledge Exchange](#).

A summary of the Terms of Reference (ToR) for all groups, including the Cornwall LFG, can be found on the [Our Groups](#) tab on the Clean Catch website.

Engagement and Feedback

ZSL's Aadil Siddiqi delivered a presentation on engagement with fishermen in Cornwall. Aadil is based in ZSL's Aquatic Species and Policy Team, where he works on CC's inclusive conservation engagement processes. Key points from the presentation include:

- The pinger trial in Cornwall is voluntary, and such schemes are often under-studied. CC aimed to understand the motivations behind fishermen joining the pinger trial. Initially, ZSL presented the main reasons found in the scientific literature, such as intrinsic motivation to help, potential for significant changes in bycatch management, and the impacts on their fishing.
- CC took a step further by investigating the sources of fishermen's motivation through direct interviews with those impacted by CC activity between September to October 2024. The interview questions focused on local knowledge and experience of bycatch, and the level of control they felt over decisions. From the responses, four key themes emerged:
 - **Priorities:** Interactions were initially high but then reduced, and are now generally low. Bycatch was secondary to the management of commercial catch.
 - **Preferred tools for bycatch trials:** Fishermen preferred tools that were easy to use, with a preference for mitigation over monitoring.

- **Role within the trial:** There was a need for more clarity on their role and influence within the trial. Recognition for their participation and extra effort was also deemed important.
- **Engagement:** Regular, substantial updates were desired. Fishermen expressed uncertainty about how data was used and believed there was value even in recording zero data. They also sought clarity on how complaints were handled.

Feedback was solicited from the LFG attendees to confirm these insights. Fishermen agreed that communication about data utilisation post-recording was often lacking. Fishtek emphasised that effective data flow and public communication were critical yet frequently overlooked. Recognition of fishermen's contributions was highlighted as vital but challenging due to the sensitivity surrounding bycatch.

Research questionnaires included statements ranked from 1 to 5, reflecting the willingness of fishermen to participate based on their strong feelings towards certain statements. Results indicated a strong connection to their local waters and identity, with a consensus on the necessity to address bycatch through a co-designed trial.

When asked if these results resonated with them, fishermen at the LFG indicated concerns about being blamed or criticised when completing questionnaires. They felt under attack regarding their fishing practices and believed they were outnumbered by eNGO groups, leading to resistance to implementing suggested changes.

Aadil's research recommended building trust between fishermen and other stakeholders, recognising the urgency driven by government objectives. A co-designed trial was deemed preferable to alternative bycatch management strategies. Such a trial should have a clear vision communicated to fishermen and offer ownership opportunities for their social science data.

ZSL also presented on a grievance process which has been established, including an online form for feedback or liaising with officers.

CC expressed its thanks to the fishermen who shared their knowledge and insights with the programme for this research. We appreciate the time taken to help shape CC's equitable engagement and co-design activities.

Clean Catch App Update

Cefas provided an update on the progress of Clean Catch App, including the changes which have been designed to support the pinger trial, in collaboration with fishermen. The app is currently available on app stores, but a more formal launch is planned for 2025 with communications being aimed at fishermen and fishing organisations on how they can access it and use it.

Pinger Trial Update

The pinger trial aims to evaluate the effectiveness of pingers in reducing bycatch of cetaceans. It involves a paired design setup with a control net (i.e. without pingers) and a net with pingers placed on either the head rope or bottom line every 200m, maintaining a 1km distance between pinger and control nets. Bycatch information is self-reported by the fishermen through the

Clean Catch app, with REM (Remote Electronic Monitoring) video footage of the fishing activity used for validation of the app data. For those who prefer not to use the app, an alternative paper record is available.

An update on the number of fishermen using REM, the app, pingers, and their fishing areas was provided to the LFG.

Fishermen's Feedback and Insights

Cefas have engaged with fishermen, inquiring about their motivations for joining the trial. Responses indicate that some have experienced significant bycatch and sought assistance, while others saw the trial as an opportunity to test pingers, which were previously restricted inshore. However, there was initial resistance to recording of bycatch data due to concerns about revealing issues and potential monitoring leading to bay closures. The installation of cameras on boats surfaced as a major issue, reflecting general concern about the wider use of REM.

Fishermen noted that the use of pingers required slight adaptations depending on the type of nets used, but the Fishtek pingers were reported to be user-friendly. Observations highlighted variances in bycatch views, such as those learned when two of the trial participants travelled to Cyprus to attend the first Small-Scale Fisheries (SSF) Regional Symposium for Europe, and found fishers there were motivated to use pingers to prevent catches being taken, rather than their own motivations of preventing dolphin entanglement. Some participants joined the trial to ensure their perspectives were included in decision-making processes. They recognised the importance of voicing their opinions and participating in trials to influence outcomes.

Trust and Data Management

Defra queried participants about their level of trust since joining the trial and whether they felt reassured that the aim was not to close the area but to explore alternative solutions. Concerns were more about data management and who would access the data. Participants expressed worries about eNGOs potentially misrepresenting the data negatively. Comparisons were drawn with Australia's bycatch issues and resistance to REM.

Bycatch Observations

A significant point raised was the low incidence of bycatch during the trial. It was acknowledged that eliminating bycatch entirely is unrealistic as long as fishing gear is used. Public perception of bycatch is influential, even when numbers of bycatch are sustainable. Acceptance of a certain bycatch level is crucial for progressing towards meaningful bycatch reduction measures.

Participation Challenges

Initial reluctance among fishermen to join the trial was noted. Offering pingers for free increased willingness to participate, although some might keep them for future use or resale.

Effortless implementation, such as attaching pingers without needing to record data in a formal trial setting, such as having to self-report bycatch and having remote electronic monitoring onboard, was preferred. Suitability varied depending on the type of fishing gear used; some gear accommodated pingers easily, while others did not.

Passive Acoustic Reflector (PAR) Update

The objective of the PAR development is to enhance the acoustic visibility of nets in a manner that is convenient for fishermen, specifically by matching floats on a net. PAR was developed to reflect specific frequencies of sound. Various prototypes were tested in a tank and the final prototype was ‘wet-tested’ at sea during fishing activities to determine their durability during hauling.

In the at-sea test, PARs were incorporated within the nets, rather than attached to head floats. Only two breakages occurred initially, and overall, the design was satisfactory. Improvements are needed in the central join strength and internal acoustics to ensure uniform performance. The initial robustness trial was promising, but further trials on different nets and conditions, including prolonged exposure on deck, are required.

The ZSL Institute of Zoology (IoZ) addressed the applicability of PARs in gillnet fisheries, stating that it is premature to conclude their effectiveness. While a trial similar to that of pingers could be conducted, budget constraints and low bycatch rates pose challenges. Additionally, understanding the impact on bycatch reduction is complex, and PARs are in early development stages compared to pingers. ZSL explained that they will be holding an Expert Working Group in early April 2025, which would include industry, Government, and specialists in the fields of bycatch and acoustics. Following recommendations from the NAB, the meeting will focus on determining the next steps for the development of PARs.

Options for progressing the development of PAR were presented:

- Behavioural studies using sensitive hydrophones, though this approach is costly and resource-intensive.
- Trial conducted in fisheries with higher bycatch rates, such as in Peru; however costly and the transferability of findings to UK fisheries remains uncertain.
- Tank trials offer another possibility, although their relevance to real-world conditions is debated.

An LFG attendee expressed scepticism regarding the acoustic efficacy of current PAR designs and questioned the validity of tank trial results. He suggested abandoning the use of internal foam within the PAR design. Discussions included alternative PAR designs, such as pearl nets, varying net placements, and exploring additional trial locations like Norway or Iceland with higher bycatch rates.

Feedback from fishermen raised concerns that PARs might inadvertently attract cetaceans due to their curiosity. Understanding cetacean behaviour when bycaught, the causes of bycatch, and the underwater dynamics of nets is crucial. Numerous questions arise before progressing with PAR implementation.

Guest Speaker

Nick Tregenza and Joe Dennett from Chelonia Ltd. (manufacturer of equipment for acoustic monitoring of cetaceans) provided an update to some of their research projects at the LFG.

The guest speakers discussed the importance of acoustic monitoring of cetaceans and major insights this has provided, and the Cetacean Acoustic Trend Tracking project, which monitors the population densities and distribution of cetaceans. This methodology, previously applied globally, has been implemented in the UK over the past four years. Around the Isles of Scilly, trends indicate seasonal and diel patterns in cetacean presence. A significant monitoring array, set to be deployed in the Celtic Sea alongside floating wind turbines, aims to reveal inshore-offshore patterns. Currently, data collection has focused on inshore information, but there is considerable local data from F-PODs. The goal is to identify long-term trends and deepen the understanding of cetacean populations.

Closing remarks

Reflection: Open discussions may be more effective than numerous presentations, as they allow more time for feedback and idea exchange.

There were points raised regarding the sensitivity of bycatch, and there is a desire to better communicate the successes of the project.

An action for us to take forward is better celebrating/publishing fishermen and other's efforts.

Local Focus Groups (LFGs) will meet every six months, but we seek input from others on their objectives for these meetings and from whom they would like to hear.